DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 768 EC 182 373

AUTHOR Steckelberg, Allen L.; Vasa, Stanley F.
TITLE Paraprofessional and Teacher Perceptions of Their Role Relationships.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (64th, New Orleans, LA, March 31-April 4, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Paraprofessional School Personnel; *Role Perception; *Special Education Teachers; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

This study investigated differences between teachers' and teacher aides' perceptions of their relationship along the dimensions of authoritative/democratic supervision style, ownership of classroom outcomes, role dynamics of the relationship, and the perceived adequacy of the other participant. Results were obtained through administrations of four subscales consisting of polar adjectives concerning the dimensions of interest to 35 teacher and 34 teacher aides at four sites. Mean scores for both groups indicated that the relationships were viewed positively. Multivariate analysis of variance procedures indicated a significant difference between the teachers and the teacher aides on the set of dependent variable. Stepdown follow up produced a significant difference on the authoritarian/democratic dimension but the remaining residualized variables were not significant. It was concluded that teachers and teacher aides may view their relationship differently and that further study of their relationships is warranted. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED268768

Paraprofessional and Teacher Perceptions of Their Role Relationships

Allen L. Steckelberg and Stanley F. Vasa, Ed.D
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Running Head: PARAPROFESSIONAL AND TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

EC 182373

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Allen L. Steckelberg
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

This study investigates differences between teachers' and teacher aides' perceptions of their relationship along the dimensions of authoritative/democratic supervision style, ownership of classroom outcomes, role dynamics of the relationship, and the perceived adequacy of the other participant. Results were obtained through administrations of four subscales consisting of polar adjectives concerning the dimensions of interest to 35 teacher and 34 teacher aides at four sites. Mean scores for both groups indicated that the relationships were viewed positively. Multivariate analysis of variance procedures indicated a significant difference between the teachers and the teacher aides on the set of dependent variable. Stepdown follow up produced a significant difference on the authoritarian/democratic dimension but the remaining residualized variables were not significant. It was concluded that teachers and teacher aides may view their relationship differently and that further study of their relationships is warranted.

Paraprofessional and Teacher Perceptions

of their Role Relationships

Paraprofessionals are being utilized with increasing frequency in the delivery of special education programs (Pickett, 1984). Blessing (1967) and Esbensen (1966) have emphasized the important role of the paraprofessional in the actual delivery of instruction. In one study, teacher aides and teachers confirmed this role estimating that as much as 60% of teacher aides' time was spent in working directly with individuals and groups of students (Vasa & Steckelberg, 1982). The utilization of paraprofessionals has become an important component of many special education programs.

Paraprofessionals have been shown to be effective across a variety of settings when proper supervision and training have been provided (Guess, Smith & Ensminger, 1971; Cowen, Dorr, Sandler, McWilliams, 1982; Shortinghuis & Frohman, 1974). Potential benefits attributed to paraprofessional use have included more teacher time for creative planning, provision of more individual attention and an increase in the quality of instruction (Cruickshank & Haring, 1957). In one study however, where proper

training and supervision were not specifically provided, an analysis of the time spent by teachers and paraprofessionals showed that paraprofessionals were not well used and that their presence was not associated with an increase in the quality of instruction or student time on task (Walter, 1983).

Supervision styles have been discussed by several authors in the social services and education fields as factors in the performance of paraprofessionals. Etzioni (1961) suggested that an individual who is a "lower participant" is affected by the power of the organization. As a result, the individual develops different types of involvement such as alientative, calculative, and moral strategies. Austin suggested that supervisory relationships might: 1) activate inner conflicts concerning authority, 2) encourage dependency, 3) invoke threats to personal integrity, sense of adequacy, and sense of vulnerability, and, 4) invoke fear of shame criticism, disapproval, or rejection. Austin has further contrasted professional and bureaucratic management styles. Bureaucratic management being characterized by a use of management skills, an orientation to the agency, defined rules and structures, and minimal experimentation, whereas professional management has a greater emphasis on the

needs of the client, the use of teaching and consultative skills, greater flexibility, experimentation, and the ability to work out a relationship. Austin advocates the use of the professional management style as more appropriate for schools and social agencies.

Wasserman (1971) found that only a small minority of paraprofessionals felt that supervisors were competent. The rest saw supervision as a bureaucratic control device which acted as a mediator for the organization. Professionals were viewed as insecure and frightened, unsure of authority and power and more interested in organizational demands.

Several problems with the traditional view of supervision have been noted by Davis(1965):

1. assimilation of knowledge and internalization of standards are weakened by extreme controls.

2. adult self concept of autonomy and self direction is reaffirmed as the relationship between the supervisor and the paraprofessional shifts from one of domination to one of reciprocity and assistance between two adults.

Heller & Pickett (1978) have advocated "collaborative supervision practices" as one means of improving the performance

of teacher aides in special education programs. Collaborative supervision contrasts with supervision which emphasizes control and possible interference and is more similar to constructive evaluation. It is characterized as a helping relationship based on mutually reciprocal interaction between the supervisee and the supervisor whose primary goal is helping the supervisee improve his/her performance. Aspects of collaborative supervision indentified by Heller & Picket (1978) include 1) clarification of roles, 2) clear communication, 3) integration into the classroom and, 4) the use of a clinical evaluation model designed to provide constructive feedback to the teacher aide.

Much of the literature concerning supervision of paraprofessionals has concentrated on implementing this supportive and helping type of relationship. This study is an attempt to isolate several of the dimensions of the relationships between teachers and teacher aides for further study. In particular, the perceptions of paraprofessionals and professionals concerning their relationship with each other are examined. An essential component of this relationship is the focus on a helping and supportive environment versus a control oriented environment as noted by Etzioni (1961), Austin (1978), Wasserman (1981), Davis

(1965), and Heller & Pickett (1983). This dimension is characterized in this study in terms of an authoritarian versus a democratic style of supervision and is the primary variable of interest.

A second aspect under consideration is the perceptions of paraprofessionals and professionals toward who has "ownership" of the quality and success of classroom procedures. Although by definition teachers have final responsibility, some supervisory styles may allow for more internalization of responsibility for the goals of the program on the part of the paraprofessional. Etzioni (1961) and Davis (1965) have indicated that this characteristic of the paraprofessional role is both affected by the supervisory style and affects the performance of the paraprofessional.

Another aspect of the supervisory relationship discussed by Austin (1978) was the differences in flexibility and experimentation which should be included in a professionally oriented supervisory model. As a means of investigating this aspect, teachers' and teacher aides' perception of role dynamics is examined.

A final aspect which might affect the supervisory relationships between professionals and paraprofessionals includes factors which relate the participants' perceptions of the value and competency of the other person. Wasserman (1981) has indicated that potentially many paraprofessional may view professionals as lacking competency. In addition, Etzioni (1961) has discussed the problems that paraprofessionals encounter because they are considered as unimportant participants in the educational process.

Existing literature would suggest that these components do affect the relationships between teachers and paraprofessionals and that potentially paraprofessionals may view the relationship differently than do the teachers. This study investigated the differences between teachers' and teacher aides' perceptions of the authoritative and democratic style of their relationships. As controlling factors teachers' and teacher aides' perceptions of ownership for the results of their work, perceptions of the role dynamics of the relationship, and the subjects' perceptions of the adequacy of the other person have been included.

Method

As a means of assessing teachers' and teacher aides' perceptions of their relationship, a 40 item scale was developed. Items consisted of bipolar adjectives with nine blanks between each pair of words. Subjects were asked to mark the blank which best represented their feeling about the teacher-teacher aide relationship. The instrument was composed of four subscales of ten items each. Individual subscales were designed to measure differences in perceptions along one of four dimensions. Subscale one included items designed to differentiate between an authoritative and a democratic view of the teacher/ paraprofessional relationship. The coefficient alpha for this subscale was .65. The second subscale contained items reflecting a qualitative assessment of the relationship. Items for this subscale were selected to differentiate positive from negative perceptions of the relationship. The corresponding coefficient alpha for the second subscale was .85. Subscale three addressed the dimension of role dynamics. Aspects in this dimension included activity level, flexibility, and clarity of roles. Coefficient alpha for the subscale was .86. The final subscale attempted to measure the subjects internalization of the goals of

the classroom and their ownership for the success of the learning process. The corresponding coefficient alpha for the subscale was .66.

The instrument was administered to 34 paraprofessionals and 35 teachers prior to the delivery of inservice training at four different sites. All participants were employed in special education settings and all teachers were currently supervising teacher aides. Special education programs ranged from programs for the severely and profoundly handicapped to resource programs serving the mildly handicapped.

Analysis

The multidimensional nature of the subscales and their nonorthogonal relationships dictated a multivariate approach to the analysis of the data (Bray & Maxwell, 1982). Since the focus was on investigation of differences between teachers' and paraprofessionals' perceptions, the independent variable in the design was the classification of the subjects as either a teacher or paraprofessional. Four dependent variables labeled as authority/democratic, value, role dynamic, and ownership represented scores on each of the four subscales. Following an apriori decision based on the nature of and the relationships

between the four dependent variables they were considered in the analysis in the following order of importance: 1) authoritative/ democratic, 2) ownership, 3) role dynamic, and 4) value. Since the dependent variables were likely to have moderate to high relationships among themselves and there was sufficient logic for ordering the variables, follow up of significant MANOVA results was conducted in a stepdown fashion.

Results

Group means and standard deviations for each of the four dependent variables are reported in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Subscale scores correlation matrix is reported in Table 2. Considerable intercorrelation is evident between all of the dependent variables, emphasizing the need for a multivariate approach to the analysis. The highest relationship was between value judgements and perceptions of the role dynamic and the smallest relationship was between the ownership variable and the judgement of the value of the relationship.

Insert Table 2 about here

The global test for a multivariate relationship produced a Wilks lambda of .83642. A Rao transformation of the Wilks lambda produced an approximate F value of 2.93363 with 4 and 60 degrees of freedom ($p < .05$). Based on theoretical importance, the four dependent variables were entered in the following order of importance for the purposes of the follow up stepdown analysis:1) authoritarian/democratic; 2) ownership; 3) role dynamic; and 4) value. Results of the stepdown analysis are shown in Table 3. Since each of the comparisons are orthogonal in nature a per comparison alpha level of .05 was maintained. Examination of the residualized variables of value, dynamic, and ownership in that order shows stepdown F values which are not significant. The dependent variable of authoritarian/democratic style did produce a significant stepdown F value ($F= 4.4091$, $df= 1,63$, $p < .05$), indicating a significant difference between teachers and teacher aides on their perceptions of the authoritarian or democratic nature of their relationship.

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

In general it can be said that the perceptions of teachers and teacher aides concerning their relationships were positive. The mean scores for both groups on each of the four variables indicates that they perceive the relationship as one that is democratic in nature, in which both members have ownership for the results of their activities, and characterized by flexibility and adequate personnel. It should also be noted that although less positive than the other dependent measure participants also felt that the other person in the relationship was competent and had positive value. These results would tend to contradict the findings of Wasserman (1981) that only a minority of paraprofessionals felt that supervisors were competent. They support, however, the existence of professional management (Austin, 1978) and collaborative supervision (Heller & Pickett, 1983) approaches to supervision of teacher aides.

Results of the study do indicate that there is a significant multivariate effect for the difference between teachers' and

teacher aides' perceptions of their relationship. Stepdown follow up of this effect shows that teachers view their relationships with aides as being more democratic in nature than do the teacher aides. Several alternatives may account for these differences. They may be a reflection that the paraprofessionals do view themselves as a low status participant as suggested by Etzioni (1961). In addition, it may mean that the teachers' perceptions of how democratic the relationship is may differ from that of the person being supervised, suggesting that communication of intentions in the relationship is not adequate. Finally it may indicate that teachers' perceptions of their own supervisory styles are inaccurate from the teacher aides' perspective. In this study the perceptions of the variables of ownership, role dynamic, and value when the previously considered variable(s) had been accounted for were not significantly different between teachers and teacher aides.

Several cautions concerning the study should be noted. First, due to the experimental nature of the measures used it is possible that the results may have been influenced by a lack of sensitivity in the instruments and additional variability due to the limited reliability of the authoritarian/democratic and the

ownership subscales. Secondly, although anonymity was assured, teachers and teacher aides may also have been influenced in their responses by completing the instrument in the same room at the same time.

The study does suggest that various aspects of the relationship between teachers and teacher aides can be investigated and that differences do exist. Additional investigations of interest might include examination of 1) the relationship between self-concept of the teacher aide and their perceptions of the relationship, 2) the effect of the participants' perceptions of their relationship on their performance in educational settings, and 3) the effects of training for both the teacher and the teacher aide on their relationship.

References

Austin, M. J. (1978). Professionals and paraprofessionals. New York: Human Sciences Press.

Blessing, K. R. (1967). Use of teacher aides in special education: A review and possible implications. Exceptional Children, 34, 107-113.

Bray, J. H. & Maxwell, S. E. (1982). Analyzing and interpreting significant MANOVAs. Review of Educational Research, 53(3), 340-367.

Cowan, E., Dorr, D., Sandler, I., & McWilliams, S. (1971). Utilization of nonprofessional child-aides in the school mental health program. Journal of School Psychology, 9, 131-136.

Cruickshank, W. M., & Haring, N. G. (1957). A demonstration: Assistants for teachers of exceptional children. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

Davis, D. A. (1965, April). Teaching and administrative functions in supervision. Social Work, p. 83.

Ebensen, T. (1966). Should teacher aides be more than clerks. Phi Delta Kappan, 47, 237.

Etzioni, A. (1961). A comparative analysis of complex organizations. New York: Free Press.

Guess, D., Smith, J., & Ensminger, E. (1971). The role of non-professional persons in teaching language skills to mentally retarded children. Exceptional Children, 37, 447-453.

Heller, B., & Pickett, A. L. (1983). Effective utilization of paraprofessionals by professionals training manual. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Pickett, A. L. (1984). The paraprofessional movement: An update. Social Policy, 14(3), 40-43.

Shortinghuis, M. S., & Frohman F. A. (1974). A comparison of paraprofessional and professional success with preschool children. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 7(4), 62-64.

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A. L., & Ronning, L. (1982). A state of the art assessment of paraprofessional use in special education in the state of Nebraska. Lincoln, NE: Barkley Memorial Center.

Walter, G. A. (1983). Special education programs in District 27: Teacher activity, student activity, student time on task and program structure. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 238 214)

Wasserman, H. (1981). The professional social worker in a bureaucracy. Social Work, 16, 90-91.

Table 1

Mean Subscale Scores and Standard Deviations by Classification

Variable	Teachers		Paraprofessionals	
	M	SD	M	SD
Authority	73.36	7.27	67.28	14.92
Ownership	77.52	8.66	76.62	15.89
Role Dynamic	72.09	10.07	70.12	16.71
Value	59.93	9.02	59.87	14.77

Table 2

Correlation Between Dependent Variables

	Authority	Ownership	Dynamic	Value
Authority	1.00			
Ownership	.65458	1.00		
Dynamic	.74159	.64448	1.00	
Value	.79965	.57601	.83448	1.00

Table 3

Stepdown Analysis of the Dependent Variables

Variable	SS	MS	DF	F
Authoritative/Democratic				
Between	602.0333	601.0333	1	4.40491*
Error	8596.1049	136.4461	63	
Ownership				
Between	254.2303	254.2303	1	2.94419
Error	5353.6845	86.3497	62	
Role Dynamic				
Between	61.42344	61.4234	1	.77566
Error	4830.5174	79.1888	61	
Value				
Between	124.9799	124.9799	1	3.2035
Error	2340.8148	39.0136	60	

* $p < .05$